

Coins

When tested, the grading system often fails

By Roger Boye

ONE CHICAGO coin collector recently ordered some standing Liberty quarters from four dealers.

All four orders had to be returned to the dealers because of improperly graded coins.

"When I'm paying for an extremely fine graded coin, why do the dealers send me coins grading only very fine and think I'd settle for them?" the collector wrote in a long letter critical of grading standards used by dealers.

The subject of grading [determining the condition of a coin] has generated more letters to coin periodicals than perhaps any other topic in

the last year. Many dealers overgrade coins they sell to collectors, some letter writers complain. And the difference in price between two grades is often substantial. For example, an extremely fine 1930 standing Liberty quarter sells for \$12; a very fine specimen retails for \$6.

At present, coin collecting lacks a universally accepted grading standard. The standards that are used [such as "A Guide to the Grading of U.S. Coins" by Martin Brown and John Dunn, or "Photograde" by James Ruddy] sometimes differ in the kind of coin that merits a certain grade classification.

The American Numismatic Association is

studying the coin grading question and may make recommendations concerning a universal grading system later this summer. A universal standard could solve many of the problems collectors have with receiving what they consider improperly graded coins from dealers. Of course, problems would continue with unethical dealers who purposely send overgraded coins.

In the meantime, collectors ordering coins by mail should note in the advertisement which grading system [Brown and Dunn or Photograde, for example] the dealer is using. And the coins should be ordered from dealers who guarantee a return privilege if the collector is not satisfied.